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Environmental Committee Testimony

My name is Brian Winslow, Director of Operations and Animal Welfare with Petland, and I would like to address the idea that eliminating puppy sales in an existing store is as easy as switching puppies for dog food, toys and other products. Having consulted and reviewed financial statements of pet retailers for the past 20 years, changing business models is a very difficult and often impossible transition.

I am here – as I was for each of the Task Force meetings because we have a Connecticut franchisee operating under the name of Safari Stan Pet Center. Within the Petland family, we have some locations that sell puppies and others that do not. While both are models that CAN succeed, there are fundamental differences between the two models and it is not as easy as removing puppies and replacing them with dog food, dog toys and other supplies.

One of the most obvious and costly differences between stores that sell puppies stores that don't is their physical layout. Tens of thousands of dollars are invested into not only the unique pet fixtures and equipment (in our case veterinarian grade tables, sinks, walls, cabinets etc) but additional tens of thousands are invested into the necessary upgraded plumbing, electrical, and HVAC requirements. All of the fixtures and equipment would need to be removed, the space remodeled and replaced with additional merchandise fixtures. The total cost of throwing away fixtures and buying new would be enormous.

By selling puppies, an independent, local pet store distinguishes itself from big box competitors and establishes a loyal customer base. I know many of the stores in Connecticut have spent years and years developing loyal customers. This is essential to their survival in the suburban communities where most of these stores are located. Large national chains purchase their retail products at a much lower price than small, local retailers because of their size and buying power. As a result it is very difficult to compete head to head on just products. In fact, the single largest retailer of pet food and products in the country is Wal-Mart, and I

think we all know the challenges of competing against national chain stores regardless of the category.

A store that sells puppies has different training programs for their employees than non-puppy stores. The two business models also have different marketing and advertising strategies as well. To some degree, changing your business model requires finding new customers. Ask any retailer in any business the challenge of acquiring new customers.

As you consider the future of this legislation I encourage you to keep in mind the impact on store owners and employees. They can't just flip a switch and adopt a new business model; it is a costly and complicated process that would drive many if not most existing Connecticut puppy selling stores out of business.

Thank you for your time.